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U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

Subject: "Combatting the Cockroach." Information approved by the Bureau of Entomology. U.S.D.A.

Bulletin available: "Cockroaches" (Farmers' Bulletin 658)

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An afternoon's visit to the zoo put Horace in such a talkative state last evening that he forgot to go home at half-past seven. When his father came over in search of him half an hour later Horace was still talking about the animals he had seen.

"If we could only have a zoo in our backyard," said Horace. "Ann and I could visit the zebra and the gnu every single day."

"Where would the animals stay on cold nights like this? There is no shelter for them in our yard," suggested Horace's father.

Horace pondered that problem and finally said hopefully: "Perhaps the little animals could stay in our kitchen at night. It would be nice and warm for them there."

"There's nothing like a five-year-old imagination to arrange matters. Next thing you'll be suggesting that the big cobra might be invited to spend the night in our bathtub. But speaking of a zoo in a kitchen at night, Aunt Sammy, we are beginning to think we really have one in our household. No, Horace's zebras haven't moved in as yet, but a tribe of cockroaches have. Any evening when the light is turned on in our kitchen quantities of these disgusting insects are to be seen scurrying around the sink, floor and shelves. Whole families, including cousins and great aunts, come out to picnic in the darkness. My wife is having a dreadful time getting rid of them."

Uncle Ebenezer asked if poison had been tried.

"Poison, Uncle Ebenezer? Those roaches are far too wary to touch the poisoned food we set out for them. They just walk around the poison and go on their way rejoicing. Though they eat practically every kind of food, they seem able to detect readily a very little arsenic in baits. We've tried various paste mixtures containing arsenic, but not one roach would take even a taste."

In spite of these unsuccessful attacks made by Horace's father, there are successful methods of controlling roaches.

The scientists in the Bureau of Entomology have told me so and I intend to pass on the good news.

First let me mention that it is of greatest importance to have the kitchen and pantry left spick and span each night; the sink clean, the drainboards, shelves and table immaculate, and the garbage pail tightly covered. All food should be put away in tight, insect-proof containers. No bits left here or there to offer a meal to the cockroaches. No dirty cracks and crannies offering a tempting invitation for a midnight feast. Watch wooden drainboards especially. Cracks where the wood has rotted may be drawing the pests and hiding them as well.

Then there are three ways to end such nightly roach festivities in kitchens and pantries. You may use certain poison and repellents; or you may fumigate. Choose the method you prefer.

Of the poisons in powder form the most efficient is sodium fluoride. (You'll remember that name from your high school chemistry class). A liberal dusting of this about the infested spots is an effective means of elimination. You can use this substance pure, or mixed half and half with flour. With the use of a dust gun or blower it can be thoroughly spread over the shelves, tables and floors and the runways and hiding places of roaches. Almost immediately the roaches will come out of their retreats. At first they will rush around blindly and in a few minutes afterward die or become paralyzed. They can then be swept up and burned. Sodium fluoride is poisonous to man if taken internally in amounts as large as a tablespoonful at one time. But as used in dusting for cockroaches no one has been injured that the Department knows of. The powder should be swept up after it has killed the roaches and should never be placed where children can eat it. This powder is very generally used throughout the country by experienced insect exterminators and is considered the best all-around roach control known for the average home.

Powdered borax, flowers of sulphur and pyrethrum powder may also be used effectively. To make the borax more inviting to the insects, mix one part of powdered borax to 3 parts of finely pulverized chocolate and sprinkle this mixture freely about the infested premises. It won't be long before those moonlight roach conventions will stop meeting in your kitchen.

That's enough for me to say about remedies. If you want further direction there is a bulletin containing four pages of helpful advice about getting rid of cockroaches. When you finish reading that little bulletin you will be surprised how much interesting information you will have gathered. Frankly, I'm not fond of insects. Even crickets and honey bees don't appeal to me. As for roaches, I've always gone across the street when I saw one coming. Nevertheless I read that bulletin all through and found it interesting -- and comforting. I ever I see a roach scampering in my pantry, I shan't stand and shudder in disgust. I'll end his life by a scientific method.

Before I stop I would like to tell you a few interesting facts I've learned recently about roaches. With all this knowledge in my head, I simply must tell somebody.

Did you know that roaches are among the commonest and most offensive of the insects which frequent human habitations?

Did you know that there are four kinds of roaches likely to be pattering in and out among us? Yes, four kinds, named from the countries they originally hailed from. There's our own native American roach and then there are three foreigners -- the European or Oriental roach, quite a traveler because it is also known in England as the black beetle; the Australian roach; and the little German roach commonly known in this country as the Croton bug. This last is really the most dreadful of the lot. It is especially agile and shy and especially hard to control. It has multiplied so in this country that it is now the commonest and best known of the domestic varieties. It likes to live near waterpipes where it is damp and may be carried long distances through the pipes without injury. That little roach in your sink may have come from way across town only this morning carried along by the water pressure. A horrid animal whose injuries to food products and books and the disgusting results of their presence in pantries, storehouses and bakeries make it really a greater pest than any of the other kinds.

Roaches feed on almost any dead animal matter, cereal products or food materials of all kinds. They are also said to eat their own cast-off skins and egg cases and they even eat- or at least gnaw- woollens, leather on shoes and furniture and on book bindings. They do a lot of harm in libraries because they like the paste on the cloth covers of books as well as the leather.

Some of my friends who have lived in the Tropics tell me that roaches are appallingly big, prosperous and bold in warm countries and that some of the wild species there are brightly colored and have a wing spread of more than six inches. Just as I was thinking that there might be advantages to living in Alaska or Lapland, I learned that even in the huts of the Laplanders roaches sometimes entirely devour the stores of dried fish put away for the winter. And on shipboard, I'm told, the roaches sometimes ruin the entire supply of ship biscuits.

I say "ruined" because the damage roaches do is not only in the products they actually consume, but in the soiling of everything with which they come in contact. Wherever they occur in numbers they leave an offensive sickening odor, which is so persistent that it cannot be removed from shelves and dishes without washing with soap and water. It frequently happens that shelves on which dishes are placed become contaminated with this "roachy" odor and this is imparted to the dishes to such an extent that everything served in them will have this peculiar disgusting taste.

It's fortunate for us housewives, don't you think, that there are scientists who can help us get rid of such unwelcome visitors in our homes.

Tomorrow we'll talk about fitting up clothes closets for the children.

